

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE FEATURE RELEASE

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U.S.-BORN ANDEAN CONDORS SOARING THE SKIES OF PERU
AS PART OF EFFORT TO SAVE ENDANGERED CALIFORNIA CONDOR

Hang gliding on the thermal currents of northern Peru's Sechura peninsula, Patuxent #16 spots a group of turkey vultures on the floor of the rocky canyon below. Certain that their gathering signals food, Patuxent #16 angles its 10-foot wingspan toward them, untroubled by the bright yellow tag on one wing and the small radio transmitter on the other. The big bird sets down and with unquestioned authority shoves its way to the choice part of the carcass discovered by the turkey vultures.

Patuxent #16, a young Andean condor, is doing what comes naturally in the wild.

But until eight months ago, it had lived in a large wire pen outside Washington, D.C., at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

Now along with three other captive-bred condors from the research center and five "young of the year" from the center and the Bronx Zoo, Patuxent #16 is the ultimate test of a 10-year project to breed the endangered Andean species in captivity and transplant young to the wild. The project is designed to test all phases of the long-range effort to save the Andean species' more critically endangered relative, the California condor, which now numbers fewer than 30. Scientists hope to learn from this effort some of the secrets of condor survival which would be useful to the Peruvian condors' remaining California cousins. Although the idea may seem strange to laymen, a similar experiment with sandhill cranes led the way to helping the endangered whooping crane.

"The transplanted birds made the transition from captivity to freedom with remarkable ease," said Dr. Stanley Temple of the University of Wisconsin who is supervising the project in Peru under contract to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"They had no trouble learning to fly," he said. "They have integrated strongly with the wild condors and now range over several hundred square miles, finding their way back to the canyon where supplemental food is kept for them and also to attract other wild vultures. They have far exceeded our expectations."

The behavior of the transplanted birds is quite similar to that of wild young condors. They have been observed on occasion displacing older condors at food, begging from them, and being preened by them.

The released condors are being monitored visually and via radio telemetry by a three-person research team from the University of Wisconsin, led by graduate assistant Mike Wallace. By tracking the radio-tagged birds, including some wild ones that were trapped and similarly tagged, the team has located previously unknown concentrations of wild condors and some 40 active nest sites. From a distance and without disturbing the birds, the team has been able to study their

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habitat use and behavior, including that of four wild pairs that appear close to egg-laying.

The Wisconsin team has been in Peru since May 1980 and was joined for the month of October by senior members of the joint California Condor Research Team, Dr. Noel Snyder of the Fish and Wildlife Service and John Ogden of the National Audubon Society. While in Peru, Snyder and Ogden evaluated the safety and effectiveness of various trapping and handling procedures that may be used later with California condors. The procedures included taking blood and feather samples from captured condors, performing a minor surgical technique to determine sex, and attaching numbered tags and radio transmitters. The captured birds were held overnight for observation and then released with no apparent adverse effects. The California research team had spent the previous month in Africa, trapping and studying other large vultures.

While Patuxent #16 circles the skies of Peru and the research team perfects ways to help the California condor, the next generation of captive Andean condors is on the way at the Patuxent Center. There, the four breeding pairs have laid their first eggs of the season, which have been taken away to induce the parents to lay a second time. In the wild, condors lay only one egg every other year but at the research center, scientists have not only induced them to lay two eggs in a single season but to do so every year.

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Note to Editors: Black and white photos of Patuxent #16 are available by calling 202/343-8770.



Hatched and reared in captivity, this young Andean condor has been returned to the wild.